



THE RECOVERY REPORT

Cerro Grande Fire Recovery
Newsletter
February 2004

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FINAL ISSUE

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THE RECOVERY REPORT is produced for Los Alamos County, under a contract with Consetta Communications, and follows the County's ongoing projects in rebuilding, reconstruction and mitigation activities after the Cerro Grande Fire of May 2000.

The Road to Recovery: A Recap of the Past Three Years

The first issue of *The Recovery Report* was published in December, 2000. At that time, Los Alamos residents were working hard rebuilding their homes, their lives and their community. The first building permit was issued on August 9, 2000. A few even moved into their new homes a little over a year later.

In the three years since then, many have received their compensation from FEMA, moved into new homes, and moved on with their lives. Los Alamos County has completed numerous projects, including the reconstruction of North Road, the relocation of the Pueblo Canyon sewer main, the construction of a new water tank, and implementation of the defensible space program. Fuel thinning on County lands is progressing, and construction of the Burned Area Reconstruction (BAR) project has begun.

In this final issue of *The Recovery Report*, we will take a look back at the successful steps taken on the road to recovery, and the continuing efforts to improve Los Alamos and protect it from experiencing another tragedy like the Cerro Grande Fire.

The Cerro Grande Fire was one of the worst wildfires in the history of New Mexico, and began when a prescribed burn set on nearby Cerro Grande Peak grew out of control. The fire burned nearly 48,000 acres and 231 struc-

tures along its path before it was completely contained in July 2000. Since then, both residents who lost their homes and the County have been busy with a laundry list of recovery projects.

New Water Tank

The County built a new 7.75 million gallon water tank above Arizona Avenue that replaced an existing undersized 0.5 million gallon tank, and reduced the county's reliance on electric pumps for water replenishment of tanks.

This new tank provides much-improved and much-needed fire fighting capabilities in North Community, North Mesa and parts of Barranca Mesa.

The water tank project was one of several mitigation projects funded by FEMA. Initial proposals suggested relocating one of the twin water tanks from the Western area to the new site. However, the County decided to build a new tank because the existing tank couldn't be moved prior to the start of the 2003 fire season.

Once the new tank was placed into service in June 2003, crews began work on the twin water tanks. Plans called for the abatement of the interior lead-based paint in tank 1. This tank was then repainted and filled with water. Tank 2 has been dismantled and removed.

Road to Recovery continued on pages 2, 3 and 4



The new 7.75 million gallon water tank located above Arizona Avenue provides improved fire fighting capabilities in North Community, North Mesa and parts of Barranca Mesa.

Pueblo Canyon Sewer Main

The Cerro Grande Fire adversely impacted the watersheds in the Los Alamos area. Due to these watershed changes and a major rainstorm in July 2001, the storm water runoff flooded the canyon and washed out portions of the sewer main. Through funding provided by FEMA, the County was able to replace the sewer main before the 2002 monsoon season.

In just four months and under budget, RMCI, Inc. installed over 8,000 linear feet of sewer main using microtunneling/jack and boring technologies; excavated and placed approximately 5,000 linear feet of sewer main using the cut and cover method, installed 54 new manholes, installed 13 gabion grade control storm water structures, and regraded and reseeded the canyon. This was a significant task as the canyon is narrow and the

contractor took extra precautions to ensure protection of geologically significant features in the canyon and minimal removal of ponderosa pines.

North Road Reconstruction

A major storm in July 2001 which led to flooding of North Road forced the Corps of Engineers to declare North Road unsafe. Phase I of the North Road reconstruction project began in May 2002.

This resulted in the closure of the northern portion of North Road (Quemazon to Sycamore). Phase I included the relocation of gas and water lines to Sycamore; and the construction of a box culvert in the north tributary of Pueblo Canyon.

Phase I was completed at the end of March 2003, and construction work began on Phase II, which included additional protection of the Diamond Drive/ Pueblo Fill Bridge from potential flood damage.

The scope of work included mining a 12' diameter tunnel through the Diamond Drive embankment in Pueblo Canyon; construction of landscaped terraced embankments on both

sides of Diamond; construction of a retaining wall along North Road between Diamond and Quemazon; reconstruction of North Road to include driving lanes, bike lanes, and sidewalk; and, construction of downstream energy dissipaters.

The northern portion of North Road (Quemazon to Sycamore) was reopened in August 2002, and the southern portion (Quemazon to Diamond) was closed during Phase II construction.

North Road was officially reopened to pedestrians, bikers and traffic on November 21, 2003.

Defensible Space Project

Los Alamos County also received funding through FEMA to implement a defensible space program. Approximately 2,000 properties throughout Los Alamos were targeted for the project because they were considered high risk due to their high tree densities, steep slopes and loca-



After over a year of work, North Road reopened to pedestrians, bikers and traffic on November 21, 2003.

May 2000	May 2000	May 2000	December 2000	December 2000	April 2002	May 2002
Cerro Grande Fire scorches nearly 48,000 acres and destroys over 231 structures in Los Alamos	Los Alamos County holds the first of many Fire Survivors' meetings	Establishment of 114-unit mobile home park for fire survivors needing housing	First issue of The Recovery Report published	Dedication of the "Touch the Sky" statue	County submits Proof of Loss to OCGFC	North Road Reconstruction Phase I begins

tion in the path of high winds that favor the spreading of fire.

Properties were divided into six groups. Mitigation work began in March 2003, and the project was completed in October 2003. More than 2,300 property owners participated and improved the defensible space around their homes. For more on the Defensible Space Project, check out the articles on pages 5 and 6.

FEMAville Restoration

The County and FEMA provided an area on North Mesa to serve as temporary housing for over 100 residents who lost their homes during the Cerro Grande Fire, an area that soon became known to locals as "FEMAville". In September 2003, the Army Corps of Engineers began the restoration of FEMAville to its original condition, naming Gordon Construction as the contractor for the project.

Most of the restoration project has been completed. Reseeding and replanting of the site will occur later this spring.



After serving for three years as temporary housing to over a hundred residents who lost their homes in the fire, the trailers were removed and FEMAville was finally restored to its original condition on North Mesa — the area will be re-seeded and re-planted later this spring to complete the restoration.

Fuel Thinning/Forest Restoration

FEMA approved funding for the County's fuel thinning/forest restoration project to reduce the threat of wildfire and restore forest health.

The project involves both burned areas and mitigation areas on County land, incorporating both hand and mechanical thinning efforts. Over 930 acres are targeted for thinning over the next three to five years.

Work has been completed in some areas, including Lower Bayo Canyon and Upper Bayo Canyon.



Fuel thinning has already been completed in some areas, including this pathway along Canyon Road, across from Aquatic Center.

Revised Fire Codes

Revised fire code construction standards, approved by the

County Council in early 2001, became effective on March 22, 2001. The new requirements affecting new construction and remodeling of existing residences are intended to make construction in Los Alamos more fire resistant.

The revised codes provide requirements for such things as roofs, skylights, gutters and downspouts, and ventilation openings.

Easement Signings

As part of the electric undergrounding project, the County Utilities department needed signed easements from residents in the burned areas for utilities work. As a condition of the County receiving mitigation funds

August 2002	October 2002	March 2003	May 2003	June 2003	September 2003	November 2003
Start of mechanical fuels thinning project	Pueblo Canyon Sewer Main project completed	North Road Reconstruction Phase II begins	Last mobile home removed from FEMAville	New water tank put into service	BAR Project construction begins	North Road reopened to through traffic



Three years after the fire, the forest around the perimeter of Los Alamos shows encouraging signs of regrowth and renewal — with plenty of gambel oak, tiny aspen trees, and ponderosa seedlings providing a colorful groundcover on the hillside.

to underground electric utilities in North Community and Western area neighborhoods, FEMA required that 90% of the homeowners in a designated neighborhood participate in the program. Easement signings began in July 2001 and continued through April 2003.

Burned Area Reconstruction (BAR) Project

In an effort to be cost-effective and minimize the disruption to the community, the County combined all reconstruction activities in the burned areas into one project. This project involves the

reconstruction of 8.5 miles of roads, curbs and gutters, drainage, and sidewalks, as well as the replacement of water lines, undergrounding of electrical lines, and the installation of streetlights in the burned area. Construction began in September 2003 and is scheduled for completion in 2005. Meetings were held during the design phase to

keep residents informed of the proposed design. Neighborhood meetings are also held prior to work beginning in each neighborhood.

It has been a long road to recovery, but looking around and seeing the newly opened North Road, or the number of new homes completed or in the construction stages in burned neighborhoods, or even the on-going BAR construction zones, it is easy to see that the efforts are paying off. The Los Alamos community has made great strides in the three years since the fire, and continues to do so.



North Community residents have rebuilt many new homes since 2000, with many more in the process of being built this year. This view was taken from Yucca Street looking toward Arizona Avenue, and Yucca Street overlooking 46th Street.



Kudos to the Volunteer Task Force

Volunteers have logged numerous hours on rehabilitation, forest recovery, forest monitoring and education projects organized by the Volunteer Task Force (VTF).

Formed in the weeks following the Cerro Grande Fire, the VTF and its band of volunteers have spent the past three years planting ponderosa seedlings, rebuilding and building trails, seeding and mulching, and gathering data for researchers on seedling survival, exotic species invasion, and rainfall patterns.

Efforts were led by local residents Craig Martin and John Hogan. Craig is now the County's Open Space Specialist. John continues to work with the Fire Department on fuels thinning projects and monitoring the recovery of the forest through a County contract with USGS.

The group is also involved in environmental education programs and community service projects. It has been a tremendous asset in the recovery process in Los Alamos.

County Wraps Up Defensible Space Program

Susan DiMauro

Los Alamos County



**Defensible
Space Project**

The Los Alamos Defensible Space Project, a County program under the direction of the Fire Department, has wrapped up a successful year-long program with nearly 70 percent of eligible homeowners participating. The project was implemented at the end of 2002 in response to the Cerro Grande Fire. P.A. Smith Concepts & Designs came on board to help the Fire Department manage the project's schedule, budget and contractors. Shortly thereafter, Davey Resource Group, a division of the Ohio-based Davey Tree Expert Company, was hired to implement and promote the concepts of defensible space. Working together with the County, DRG personnel developed a comprehensive outreach program that included a logo, neighborhood informational events, education in the schools, a mascot (thanks to a cooperation with the Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics group), and many other elements to promote the value in creating defensible space. *(Editor's note: for more on the public outreach program, see the related sidebar on page 6.)*

The forestry consultant and defensible space planners from DRG conducted a wildfire risk assessment of the Los Alamos Townsite and determined 2,752 properties needed defensible space work. During the summer, 650 properties in White Rock also

were identified as eligible for work. With their background and experience, the forester and planners knew the targeted lots were

firefighters. To participate, homeowners signed a contract promising to maintain their defensible space for at least five years. Once

By the close of 2003, Los Alamos County's Defensible Space Project successfully helped protect more than 2,300 properties in Los Alamos and White Rock from future wildfire threat, and thousands of residents throughout the county have been educated about the concepts of defensible space. This outstanding response and community involvement helped assist in the reduction of wildfire risk throughout the county and improve firefighters' abilities to protect homes in the event of another wildfire. For this, the Los Alamos Fire Department expresses its sincere gratitude and appreciation. Each and every participant helped Los Alamos County prove the project motto, "Defensible space is a community goal!"

created, defensible space is fairly easy to maintain through simple tasks such as removing pine needles, firewood and other combustible debris near a home and continuing to remove trees and limbs in dangerous proximity to eaves and chimneys.

For more defensible space guidelines or information on wildfire preparedness efforts, visit www.lac-defensiblespace.us or call 888-686-7782 toll free.

at high risk for wildfire due to high tree densities, steep slopes and location in the path of high winds that favor the spreading of fire. Defensible space planners from DRG began meeting with targeted homeowners at the beginning of 2003 to perform individual property assessments and create agreeable defensible space work plans. Baca's Trees, Inc. and Trees, Inc. joined the defensible space team as the contractors charged with completing the mitigation work on private properties.

Although the planning and implementation phases of the project are now over, property owners throughout Los Alamos County are being encouraged to continue making their properties defensible for wildland



Raking leaves is just one example of simple maintenance work that property owners can do to maintain a defensible space around their homes.

It Takes a Community

Susan DiMauro



Before defensible space work, this tree posed a hazard in the event of a wildfire.

The success of the Los Alamos County Defensible Space Project would not have been possible without contributions and a team effort from several groups, especially Los Alamos County Council, the County attorneys, the procurement office, citizen groups, homeowners associations, firefighters, foresters and the FSEEE group that so kindly debuted the Reddy Squirrel mascot in Los Alamos during Defensible Space Day.

The Los Alamos County Defensible Space Project officially was presented to the community during a public meeting Feb. 5, 2003. About 500 people attended the event, much to the surprise and delight of the project team. This tremendous interest turned into action, as reflected in the coming months and verified with the high rate of appointments made for the first two groups of homeowners eligible for defensible space assessments (of eligible property owners, 72 percent in group one and 82 percent in group two participated in the project).

Interest in the project remained strong, with nearly 250 people attending subsequent neighborhood meetings during the next several months. The project team attributes this high response rate, and much of the overall 70 percent participation rate, to public information and education presented in the form of the community meetings; one-on-one property owner meetings with defensible space planners; informational materials such as brochures and manuals; children's activities such as Defensible Space Day on March 26; news releases and advertising; a continually updated website; and a project public information officer.

The people of Los Alamos County also would not have so eagerly responded to the defensible space program without the input from the aforementioned county and community leaders, the sound project management team and knowledgeable contractors. With every property owner who participated and every member of leadership who supported the project, the wildfire

risk to the community was decreased and the chances for wildland firefighters to safely protect homes were improved. The Los Alamos County Defensible Space Project is a model for other



A defensible space contractor removes the hazardous tree from the property.



This home is much safer from the threat of a wildfire thanks to the defensible space project.

wildland urban interface communities because it proves that wildfire risks can be decreased with citizen help and community support.

CONTACT LIST

Burned Area Reconstruction (BAR) Project

Customer Service Center 661-8386

For questions on electric undergrounding,
streetlights, etc. pertaining to the burned area
reconstruction

barcustomerservicectr@lac.losalamos.nm.us

Defensible Space Project1-888-686-7782

Fuel Thinning/Forest Restoration

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Engineering & Project Management 662-8150

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Building permit status

Emma Vigil 662-8055

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Building plans examination assistance

Lawrence Catanach 662-8342

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Counseling services

Los Alamos Family Council 662-3264

24-hour Crisis Counseling 662-4422 or 1-888-920-6333

The Recovery Report

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To find out if your contractor is licensed in New Mexico, call
827-7030 or check out this website: www.newmexlicense.org.

CERRO GRANDE FIRE CLAIMS

Help Line

1-888-748-1853

Information and claims
assistance

Websites for Cerro
Grande Fire Survivors
www.cerrogrande.losalamos.com

www.fema.gov/cerrogrande

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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

As noted in the November issue, of *The Recovery Report*, this will be the last issue of *The Recovery Report* published.

It is hard to believe that it has been three years since the first issue was published in December 2000. In the beginning I told you that the purpose of this newsletter was to inform all survivors of the Cerro Grande Fire of the numerous recovery efforts taking place in Los Alamos. If you look around, you can see the results of these efforts. In some cases, these efforts continue. I hope that I have achieved the goals set in that first issue and that I have helped each of you in some small way on the road to recovery.

For updates on the ongoing BAR project and other county projects, please check out the Projects page on the County website at www.lac-nm.us.

If you need any copies of past issues of *The Recovery Report*, please contact me at 672-0476 or email goettee@hubwest.com.

Thank you.

Connie Goettee
Editor, *The Recovery Report*

IMPORTANT NOTICE

For questions about fire recovery projects featured in *The Recovery Report* during the past three years, or if you would like more information in the future about the County's on-going recovery process, call the County's public information officer, Julie Habiger, at 505 662-8083 or email her at: habigerj@lac.losalamos.nm.us.

BAR Construction Activities Begin on Woodland



Crews began construction activities on Woodland Road in early February. The project is about 18% complete. Weather conditions have created some delays, including a stop to all concrete operations. Work continues on Alabama Street, Arizona Avenue, Club Road, and 35th Street.

The BAR project is one of the County's last major recovery efforts after the Cerro Grande Fire in May of 2000. Work entails the reconstruction of 8.6 miles of street, curb and gutter, drive pad, sidewalk and pavement, as well as streetlight installation, waterline replacement, drainage culvert improvements, and the undergrounding of electric utilities.

The goal of the project is to rebuild infrastructure and roads in the North Community and Western Area neighborhoods to a condition that is superior to pre-fire conditions. The construction phase of the project began September 15, 2003 and should be completed in 2005.

Alabama Street

Crews are continuing to install drain storms. All concrete activities have ceased until the weather conditions improve.

Arizona Avenue between 45th Street and Woodland

Preparation work for sidewalks, curb and gutter will continue, but concrete work has been put on hold until the weather improves.

Arizona Avenue between Woodland and Club Roads

Crews will be cleaning up this segment of the road and will open it to through traffic. No traffic permits will be issued while work begins on Woodland Road.

Club Road between Arizona and Diamond

Crews will also be cleaning up this segment of road and opening it to through traffic.

35th Street between Arizona and Diamond

Construction activities for this segment include installation of the electric utility in the county right-of-way and to residents' homes, the construction of storm drains, and the installation of water lines.

Woodland Road

Crews are working on the installation of water lines.

Customer Service Center

A Customer Service Center for the project is open from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday at 1362 Trinity Drive, Suite A-2 (behind Viola's). Personnel are available to provide project information and/or receive suggestions or concerns regarding the implementation of the project. Residents can also call the center at 661-8386 or send an e-mail to: BARCustomerServiceCtr@lac.losalamos.nm.us.

For updates on County projects, go to www.lac-nm.us under projects.



Despite the recent winter weather, work on the Burned Area Reconstruction (BAR) project continues. The project is scheduled for completion in 2005.

Fuel Thinning Continues in Pueblo Canyon



Enviro Land Management (ELM) has completed four mechanical

treatment areas, which includes approximately 331 acres. These areas include Range Road, Diamond Drive (Block 2), Woodland and Arizona Avenues (Block 9), Upper Bayo Canyon (Block 1) and parts of Acid Canyon (Block 6). Some additional restoration will be done to restore the trails and access but further work will be done over the next few months to make the area more useable for recreation.

Pueblo Canyon

ELM has moved all equipment into the lower part of Pueblo Canyon (Block 8) and started treatment of that area in early January. Work will continue in this area until March 15, unless the work is completed

sooner. Due to environmental constraints and habitat restrictions, this area may only be treated between August 15 and March 15.

The contractor is thinning the area using hand thinning and larger mechanical equipment. Residents who use the canyon for recreation purposes have been asked to obey the posted signs and safety rules. The area may appear unsightly during the thinning and removal phase; however, all disturbed areas will be restored to promote the return of grasses, shrubs and wildflowers. All trails will also be restored after thinning work is completed.

Acid Canyon

Due to weather conditions that adversely affect the current ground conditions, thinning work has been temporarily suspended in Acid Canyon. Work will resume when weath-

er conditions improve. However, crews were able to complete 38 of the total 96 acres in this area.

For More Information

For more information regarding the Fuels Mitigation/Forest restoration Project please contact Chris Berti at 662-1962.

Diamond Drive Reconstruction

Diamond Drive has experienced significant wear and tear after debris removal and heavy rebuilding construction vehicles used the road post-fire. The County applied to FEMA for funds to repair the road, noting that such severe debilitation of the pavement would not have occurred so rapidly if not for the Cerro Grande Fire. The County received money from FEMA for pavement rehabilitation of the road on Diamond Drive between the Omega Bridge and Urban.

Additionally, the street cross section will be modified between Urban and San Ildefonso. Some traffic channelization, including a traffic circle and median islands, has been proposed. However, the design will not proceed without significant public input -- expected later in 2004 or early 2005. Construction is not expected to start until after the completion of the BAR project in 2005.

White Rock Erosion Control Project

Heavy flooding right after the fire eroded the Canada del Buey arroyo in White Rock. As a result, the County received funding from FEMA to correct the problem.

The scope of work includes armouring the Canada del Buey channel between Rover and SR4, and installing a box culvert drainage system at Pajarito Canyon under SR4 west of the SR4 and Grand Canyon intersection. Armouring the Canada channel is limited to removing sandbags placed in the area after the

fire and reshaping the arroyo to better conduct water flow that is currently eroding the embankment. The county will be placing derrick stone along those portions of the channel bank where erosion has been the most severe. Two 6' x 6" concrete box culverts with wing walls will be constructed under SR4 west of Grand Canyon at Pajarito Canyon and will replace the three existing 36" culverts.

Construction began in the Fall of 2003.